

THE HAPPY INFLUENCE OF RELIGION
ON CIVIL SOCIETY :

A

S E R M O N,

P R E A C H E D A T

The Affizes at ABERDEEN,

Sunday, May 23. 1779.

By GEORGE CAMPBELL, D D.
Principal of Marischal college, Aberdeen.

EDINBURGH:

Printed for WILLIAM CREECH.
Sold also by T. CADELL, London.

MDCCLXXIX.

REGISTERED TO THE
OFFICE OF THE
SHERIFF

NO. 1000

DATE

RECEIVED OF THE
SHERIFF

FOR THE
SHERIFF

RECEIVED OF THE
SHERIFF

FOR THE
SHERIFF

FOR THE
SHERIFF

T O

THE HONOURABLE,
FRANCIS GARDEN, Esquire,
Of GARDENSTON,

One of the SENATORS of the COLLEGE OF
JUSTICE,

A N D

One of the LORDS COMMISSIONERS of Ju-
STICIARY,

In SCOTLAND,

The following SERMON,

Preached before him, and printed by his desire,

I S,

With the greatest respect and esteem,

Inscribed by

His LORDSHIP'S

Most obedient and

most humble servant,

The AUTHOR,

THE HONORABLE

FRANCIS GARDNER

OF GARDEN

One of the Senators of the College of Justice

A. D.

One of the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury

In Scotland

The following

Traced before him and printed by his

18

With the general report and

Testified by

The Lord

And others

and printed

The Author

A

S E R M O N.

PROVERBS, xiv. 34.

Righteousness exalteth a nation.

THERE is no subject on which libertines shew more inconsistency, than on what regards the advantages derived from religion to civil society. When their design is to vindicate their open contempt of its principles, and violation of its precepts, they fail not to represent it as a burden both intolerable and unnecessary, and which, without yielding any benefit that can be called a compensation for so great a sacrifice, requires a degree of self-denial that nearly approaches to a renunciation of liberty. On the o-

A

ther

ther hand, when they attempt to account for its origin, and the universality of its reception in some form or other throughout the world, they constantly recur to the arts of politicians, who have seen the absolute necessity of this expedient for keeping the people in subjection, and adding authority to their laws. They do not seem to advert, that these pleas are incompatible with each other; and that, in regard at least to the utility of religion, they confessedly oppose the common sense of mankind; since they exhibit the leaders, and lawgivers, in every nation, as concurring, though not by concert, in the conviction, that without the reverence of some power superior to human, man would be ungovernable. Yet the belief of the existence and agency of such a power is, on other occasions, treated with ridicule by those sages, and represented as a principle not only useless, but extremely cumbersome. And if, upon reflection, any of them relax a little on this article, and admit that it may be of use, that the gross of mankind believe the superintendency of a supreme being over the affairs of the world, particularly over the actions of men, they ought

ought doubtless to account those persons bad citizens as well as infidels, who by their practice, conversation, or writings, attempt to undermine such useful principles, and, as far as in them lies, to loose the bands which, by giving additional strength to social duties, bind men more closely to one another.

Though it were easy to demonstrate, both from the nature of the thing, and from the most authentic history, that religion neither is, nor could have been, (as some have profanely represented it), a state-device for keeping the people in awe; it must be owned, that the necessity thereof for preserving the peace and order, and for promoting the happiness of social life, was very early observed, and has been universally acknowledged. But, as there may be some, who, though they admit the fact in general, may not clearly perceive the connection, and consequently may not be sufficiently fortified against the cavils of infidelity and scepticism, now so common, I purpose at this time to lay before you some of the principal arguments whereby religion is proved to be of the utmost im-

portance to the security and well-being of civil society.

This happy tendency of the religious character to advance national prosperity, is, in my judgement, the sentiment intended to be conveyed by Solomon in my text: *Righteousness exalteth a nation*. For though, by the word *righteousness*, sometimes no more is meant than the virtue of *justice*, it much oftener in scripture-language denotes 'the conscientious observance of our duty resulting from the fear of God,' and, in this acceptation, is equivalent to the term *religion*. Now to the prevalence of this principle, the wise King of Israel ascribes, in a great measure, the flourishing state of a nation or polity. To illustrate his sentiment is the scope of the present discourse.

Ye ask, 'How is religion conducive to the exaltation and felicity of the body-politic or nation?' I answer, It conduces to this end in these four different ways: by the tendency and extent of its laws; by the nature and importance of its sanctions; by the assistance which it gives to the civil powers, both in securing fidelity, and in discovering truth; and by the positive enforcement

forcement of equity and good government on the rulers, and of obedience and submission on the people. Let it be observed, that though, in this discourse, I speak of religion in general, I am always to be understood as referring to the Christian religion in particular. It is indeed true, that even those religions, if we may call them so, many or most of whose fundamental principles are erroneous, may, in a political view, be considered as beneficial, and infinitely preferable to Atheism, or total irreligion; yet it is certain, that in this as well as in other more important respects, no form of superstition can bear to be compared with that religion which alone has God for its author, and the greatest good of mankind, both temporal and eternal, for its object.

I proceed to make a few observations, and your time will admit but a few, on the four heads of discourse now mentioned. They are so many topics of argument, by which the great truth contained in my text, That *righteousness*, or true and practical religion, *exalteth a nation*, is at once both explained and evinced.

I. I begin with showing, that religion conduces to the welfare of the community, by the tendency and extent of its laws.

Concerning the tendency of the laws of the Christian institution, it is impossible for an intelligent person to doubt, that it is to promote the happiness of human society. The whole of practical religion is summed up by the great author and finisher of our faith in two fundamental precepts*. The *first* enjoins us *to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind.* The *second*, which is like to the first, and founded on it, enjoins us *to love our neighbour as ourselves.* The Apostle Paul accordingly has, with great propriety, comprehended all social duties in the latter of these precepts. *Owe no man any thing,* says he †, *but to love one another; for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law.* *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness; Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in*

* Matth. xxii. 37. 38. 39. 40.

† Rom. xiii. 8. 9. 10.

this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. To the same purpose our blessed Lord * has comprised all the duties incumbent on every man to every other, under this excellent moral maxim, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*: for this, he adds, *is the law and the prophets.* It would be mispending time to attempt to prove, that the strict observance of these precepts would both prevent the greatest evils which disturb the peace of society, and would conduce, in the highest degree, to promote mutual confidence, harmony, and goodwill, among fellow-citizens. This is a truth so evident; that, as far as I can learn, it has never been denied or disputed by any. It has only been regretted, that we have so few examples of the influence of precepts so ineffably important and divine. But this very regret implies a conviction, or rather is a confession of their goodness, and of the happy effect which religion must have on society, where-ever it meets with a suitable reception.

* Matth. vii. 12.

I include under this head not only the tendency, but the extent of the laws of religion. In regard to their tendency, there is a manifest co-operation with the municipal laws of all well-governed countries, whereby the persons, the lives, the liberty, and the property, of the people, are secured from unjust invasion or attack. But in point of extent, the difference lies here. It is the aim of religion to remove the causes of those calamities by which society is injured, whilst human laws reach only their destructive consequences. These crop the weeds, but the other plucks them up by the roots. The only things which are, or can be, subject to man's jurisdiction, are what we call *overt acts*, that is, external and discoverable actions; the principles of the heart, out of which are the issues of life, are subject to God's jurisdiction, and to it only. There is a weakness or imperfection inherent in the former, and incurable, inasmuch as it necessarily results from the imperfection of human knowledge and of human power. It is solely by the influence of religion, that this deficiency can, in any measure, be supplied. When the divine testimony is received with
faith

faith and love, it applies medicine to the spiritual diseases, and gives health and vigour to the soul. Human laws, for the protection of peace and good order in society, may concur with the divine law * in saying, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*; but it is only the word of God † that teacheth us, *That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart*. By the former, indeed, we are commanded to do no murder: From the latter ‡ we learn, that *whosoever hateth his brother is, in God's account, a murderer*. It suits the language even of human lawgivers to say, "Thou shalt not steal:" But it belongs peculiarly to the divine authority || to add, *Thou shalt not covet*. This character of religion, under the title of "the word of God," is admirably well delineated by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. *The word of God, says he **, is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and mar-*

* Exod. xx. 14.

† Matth. v. 28.

‡ 1 John iii. 15.

|| Exod. xx. 17.

** Heb. iv. 12.

row, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Thus it is evident, that religion, in respect both of the salutary tendency of its precepts, and of their extent, as reaching to the purifying of the heart, must, where-soever it is believed, conduce greatly even to the temporal happiness and flourishing state of the community.

II. I proceed, in the second place, to show, that religion eminently promotes the same end by the nature and importance of its sanctions, the rewards which it promises, and the punishments which it threatens.

It has been often pleaded, on this topic, and sometimes with an air of triumph, that though the sanctions of human laws are but temporal, and those of religion mostly eternal; yet as the former are visible and more immediate, and the latter invisible and more remote, the former have incomparably greater influence on the generality of men than the latter. But were we to admit this as a fact, it does not overturn my argument. In every statute of man which does not contradict the commandment

mandment of God, religion leaves the human and legal functions to operate with their full force upon its votaries. If its peculiar functions are admitted to be of any weight at all, (and it can hardly be thought that they will not weigh with some), they are just so much weight superadded to the other, and contributing to the same end, the public welfare.

But as to the comparative influence of the two kinds of functions, those of religion and those of the legislature, it appears to best advantage when the laws of religion and the laws of the state, unfortunately run counter to each other. This was actually the case of the primitive Christians, when Christianity was persecuted, and the very profession of it declared criminal. Were there not some, were there not even multitudes, who *then* showed the infinite superiority of its functions over all that human art and malice could set in opposition to them? Were there not then those whose conduct demonstrated, that they had thoroughly imbibed that great lesson given by their master, * *Be not a-*

* Luke xii. 4. 5.

fraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But fear him, which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell? Were there not then those who showed, in the most convincing manner, that the lively hope of a glorious immortality can surmount the horror of instant death, accompanied with ignominy and torture? Religion and the state were then at variance. And though the conflict was purely defensive on the part of the former, and what, to judge after the manner of men, we should pronounce very unequal, inasmuch as she never, even in self-defence, employed the arm of flesh, those earthly weapons which were so cruelly used against her, her patience and perseverance were at length crowned with victory, and, notwithstanding her many disadvantages, she triumphed over all opposition. Now if religion was then, though a passive, yet so formidable an adversary, when forced, against her natural bent, to take an adverse part, have we not reason to believe, that when, in conformity to her native disposition, she is engaged in the same cause, she will prove an active and a powerful ally?

But

But it is not barely by the addition of the sanctions of heaven, hell, and eternity, to those of the municipal laws, founded in the principles of natural justice, that religion co-operates with the civil powers, promoting the same end, the peace of society; there are many cases wherein the sanctions of the latter have no influence at all, whilst those of the former operate with all their force. “It is a very small matter,” said an ancient Heathen*, “to be good in the legal sense.” The reason is, those transgressions which come under the cognisance of human tribunals, must be in a particular manner circumstanced, so as to be comprehended in the precise definition which the legislature has adopted. Hence it happens, as every judicious person will admit, that a man may be notoriously a consummate villain, a disobedient son, an unnatural father, a cruel husband, a tyrannical master, a litigious neighbour, and in every respect a bad citizen, whom nevertheless no human laws can reach. Nor is there a possibility of redressing this grievance in any polity, but by what would prove a still greater

* *Exiguum est quiddam ad legem bonum esse. Seneca.*

grievance,

grievance, by conferring on magistrates and judges such a latitude of discretionary power as would render them quite arbitrary. The case is very different with the sanctions of religion, which always regard the motive, the disposition, and the intention of the agent, more than the outward circumstances of the action.

Further, though the crime should be such as to fall exactly under the description of the law, it may be so secretly committed as to elude the eye of even the most vigilant magistracy; and where, in that case, is the curb against the blackest guilt, if none is to be found in religion? Our judges, being men, are necessarily weak and imperfect. They require informations, the examination of witnesses, and other sorts of evidence. In religion, the same just, omniscient, and all-perfect being, is both the witness and the judge. How admirably is the strength of this motive illustrated in the story of Joseph? He seems to have been secure from all human detection. But he well knew, that there was a witness greater than man, from whose all-seeing eye it was impossible he should be screened. *How can I do this*
great

*great wickedness, said he *, and sin against God ?*

It is but too evident, that in this licentious age we have few such examples. But what does the smallness of the number evince ? Not the want of efficacy in the functions of religion to prove a check on mens actions, but the want of religion amongst us to supply by its functions a check on ours. It does not refute the position of the Royal Preacher †, that *by the blessing of the upright the city is exalted* ; it only shows, that there are few upright in the city to exalt and bless it. Religion operates solely by faith. It has no influence on any, farther than it is believed. We cannot then wonder, that, in those walks of life wherein scepticism and infidelity abound, we should find the utmost dissoluteness of manners. We might justly wonder, were it otherwise. A corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit, no more than a good tree can produce evil fruit. What diabolical pains and assiduity have not sometimes been employed, especially among those of superior rank, to extirpate

* Gen. xxxix. 9.

† Prov. xi. 11.

every religious principle from the minds of females, whose more delicate sensibility renders them more susceptible than men, of the influence of religion? And what has been the consequence of this, which is indeed the worst species of debauchery? In too many such an open disregard to the most sacred engagements, such shameless profligacy as, in that sex, was without example in this country in former ages. But those men have no title to complain of the effects, who, by their dissolute example, and still more by their impious conversation, have proved the principal cause of the evil.

Again, where is the check but from the sanctions of religion, on those despotic princes who have raised themselves by their arms, or have been raised by a servile people, above all law and controul? To such men religion, and religion only, can be of power enough to curb the violence of the passions. And where there is no religion, there is no restraint. Every considerate person will admit, that the conclusion formed by Abraham *, that there could be no

* Gen. xx. 11.

security for his wife's person, or his own life, against the unbridled desires of an arbitrary prince, who might do what he pleased, was a just and natural conclusion from the principle assumed by him, That there was *no fear of God in that place*.

For, let it be observed further, that religion is not entirely without influence, even on those who are not intitled to be called religious. It deters from the commission of crimes, by its threatenings, those whom its charms have not allured to the practice of virtue. An excellent illustration of the influence of religion, in the case of absolute monarchs, is given by a late writer of great genius and penetration.

“ A prince who loves religion, and fears it,
 “ is a tame lion, which yields to the hand
 “ that strokes him, and to the voice that
 “ soothes him. He who fears religion,
 “ and hates it, is an untamed lion, which
 “ bites the chain that restrains him from
 “ throwing himself upon the passengers.
 “ He who has no religion, is that terrible
 “ animal, unsubdued and at large, which
 “ is not sensible of his liberty, but when
 “ he tears in pieces and devours *.”

* De l'Esprit des Loix, liv. xxiv. ch. 2.

Permit me to add on this head, that though the principal functions of religion are future and eternal, these are not its only functions. There are some which are present and temporal. The approbation and the reproach of conscience; a belief in the superintendency of providence, in the course of which God is often pleased to defeat the secret machinations of the wicked, making the mischief intended for another to return upon the head of the contriver; and not seldom to bring unexpectedly to light the hidden things of dishonesty, to the disgrace of those who were the perpetrators, are, though regarding the present life only, not to be considered as entirely without effect.

Thus I have shown, in the second place, that religion promotes the peace and prosperity of the nation, by the nature and importance of its functions.

III. I maintain, thirdly, That it promotes the same end, by the aid which it gives to the civil powers, both in securing fidelity, and in discovering truth.

Mens conviction of the weakness of all human ties, when opposed to some powerful inducement from interest, ambition, or
 sensuality;

sensuality; their consciousness how little, in case of such a competition, faithfulness could be secured by any promise, or veracity by any protestation, has made them universally borrow help from religion, to furnish them with an additional security in aid of human engagements and allegations. Hence the origin of oaths, not only of fidelity to a trust, and of allegiance, but also in matters of evidence, in bearing testimony, both in civil causes and in criminal. Now an oath is in fact a solemn appeal to God, who knows all things, who has distinguished himself by the title of *the God of truth*, and who is the avenger of all deceit and wickedness. By connecting with the affirmation a declared sense of the divine presence and justice, a lie is loaded with the guilt of impiety; and that which would otherwise have been considered, though unjustly, as but a venial trespass, a slight departure from the duty we owe to others, is viewed in the more atrocious light of an affront to the Majesty of Heaven, whose omniscience appears to be directly insulted, and whose omnipotence appears to be defied.

I do indeed most readily admit, that as in every lie there is an infringement of the

law of God, a conscientious man will, from motives of piety as well as justice, be restrained from it. He knows, that all sins whatever, even those called sins of the second table, which are committed more directly against his neighbour, strike ultimately against God the supreme legislator, of whose law they are the violations; and for this reason I should not hesitate to pronounce of a truly good man, that his word is equivalent to his oath. But, alas! we have too much reason to think, that this integrity is not so common as might be wished. How far it is, where found, to be attributed to a sense of religion, is submitted to the candid and judicious; but, in regard to the bulk of mankind, we may safely affirm, that tho' religion meets not with that reception which can impower it to influence the whole tenor of their conduct, yet so far impresses their imagination as is sufficient for restraining them from the perpetration of crimes, especially such crimes as are universally accounted the most flagitious. Now in this number *perjury* is always classed. If then even this weak impression of a power superior to human, this very imperfect

imperfect degree of the fear of God, were, by the universal prevalence of that Atheism, and contempt of religion, which are visibly making rapid progress amongst us, and already infecting the lower classes of men, (if it were, I say), totally banished the land, it may be referred to the determination of those whom worldly considerations only can affect, whether this event, which appears so desirable to many, would conduce to the honour and purity of our families, the security of our properties, liberties, and lives. Amongst an unprincipled people, in whom is no belief of Deity or Providence, heaven, hell, or eternity, can we be so vain as to imagine that there would be much regard to the ties of truth and justice?

On those, whose birth, education, or circumstances, have brought them into the upper walks of life, it has been often thought, that a sense of *honour* would have considerable influence, and prove an effectual restraint at least from some vices, though there were very little sense of *virtue*, and none at all of *religion*. But, as far as I can recollect, it has been admitted by the sages of all times and countries,
that

that without a sense of religion of some sort or other, there could be no dependence upon the vulgar.

In respect of what is called *a sense of honour*, I beg leave to remark, that as this principle does not regard the moral pravity of the action, nor yet its pernicious consequences either to individuals or to society, but solely the disesteem wherein it happens to be among those called *the fashionable world*; so there are some of the most enormous crimes, which, in their effects, prove ruinous to individuals, and subversive of the peace of families, from which this principle of honour affords no protection whatever. It were easy to show, did time permit at present, what horrid injustice, ingratitude, treachery, cruelty, falseness, (for, in affairs of gallantry, what man of fashion thinks there is any thing dishonourable in the breach of vows?) nay what worthlessness, in many respects, may be perfectly compatible with that unaccountable character, the offspring of pride and caprice, A MAN OF HONOUR. And even in those few cases wherein something like moral qualities, such as veracity and courage, come within its precincts, as it
always

always has respect to the opinions of others, the sentiments in vogue; so, wherever absolute secrecy can be secured, it is totally disarmed. Indeed, in regard to all those vices which may be perpetrated in such a manner as to elude discovery, and give a defiance to the most inquisitive curiosity, where can be the curb on persons of any class, if all sense of *virtue* and *religion* are wanting?

‘ True,’ say some, ‘ if both are wanting; but will not the former prove sufficient without the latter?’ I shall only answer, That though I will not presume to say what in every supposable situation would possibly influence a human character, I will venture to pronounce, that if ye make a separation between those two which God and conscience have joined together, and divorce *religion* from *virtue*, ye will find ye have deprived the latter of her steadiest friend, her best comforter, her firmest support. And whatever may be the pretences or appearances of human virtue, when destitute of religion, I should not account him a very wise man who would put equal confidence in her,

as

as in what Job * denominates man's true wisdom, namely, *the fear of the Lord*.

' Ay, but there are so many hypocrites
' that wear the mask of religion, that one
' is not safe to place any trust here at all.'
True, some such characters are still to be found, though hypocrisy cannot be accounted the vice of the age. And do we not also sometimes find villains under the mask of honesty? Now, if no person in his senses ever imagined, that the detection of villany brought a discredit on honest men, or a suspicion that there is no honesty in the world, can any thing but the grossest prejudice lead us to conclude unfavourably of religion, because of the detection of some hypocrites? The standard-coin never sinks in our estimation, in consequence of the many discoveries that are daily made of artful but worthless counterfeits.

On the whole, therefore, agreeably to what I proposed, in the third place, to prove, we see how necessary the aid of religion is for securing fidelity to engagements, and for the discovery of truth in judicatories, both in civil causes and in criminal.

* Job, xxviii, 28.

IV. I come now, in the fourth and last place, to observe the utility of religion to a state, by the positive enforcement which it gives of equity and good government on the rulers, and of obedience and subjection on the people.

In regard to the first part of this head, I have, in some measure, prevented myself, when speaking of the sanctions of religion, and showing, that they are the more necessary in the case of despotic sovereigns, inasmuch as being by their station raised above controul, there is no check upon them beside religion. I shall only, therefore, at this time, with all possible brevity, point out the general views that revelation gives of all human governors. It is this which reminds them, that magistracy is a trust, for the faithful discharge whereof they are accountable to God, who in the course of his providence hath conferred it on them; that consequently *they who rule over men, ought to be just, ruling in the fear of God; that they judge not for man ultimately, but for the Lord, who is with them in the judgement* *. Is it a disadvantage to man-

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. ; 2 Chron. xix. 6. 7.

kind, that those who are supreme here, and uncontrollable, are taught to reflect, that they must themselves appear hereafter, in the quality of subjects, before the tribunal of him who is *higher than the highest*; and that their conduct, especially in ruling and judging, must undergo a strict scrutiny, under the eye of *the King of kings and Lord of lords*, that unerring judge, *who is no respecter of persons, with whom there is no iniquity*, and in whose tremendous presence the distinctions which obtain amongst us mortals, of high and low, mighty and weak, rich and poor, are all entirely levelled? Nay, would it not, on the contrary, be of unspeakable advantage to the world, that all magistrates, lawgivers, and judges, were firmly persuaded of these important truths?

On the other hand, if a pious sense of religion is the best security for good government on the part of rulers, it is also the most effectual means of ensuring submission and obedience on the part of subjects. Without some impressions of this kind, it would be difficult to persuade men that they are under any tie to obedience and subjection to others of their own species,

cies, when any strong temptation from interest or ambition should incline them to revolt. Their submission would be such only as necessity compelled, not as a sense of duty disposed them to yield. Consequently they could have no motive to restrain them from rebellion, whenever it should appear they could rebel successfully. But religion enforces our allegiance, not from the fear of the magistrate, (a motive however which it leaves in full force), but from a principle of conscience towards God; *not only for wrath*, says Paul *, *but FOR CONSCIENCE SAKE*. And Peter †, to the same purpose, *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing, ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*

THUS I have endeavoured briefly to illustrate and evince the important truth laid down in my text, That *righteousness*, or religion, *exalteth a nation*. I have shewn, that in all the four ways enumerated,—to wit, by the tendency and extent of its

* Rom. xiii. 5.

† 1 Pet. ii. 13. 15.

laws ; by the nature and importance of its sanctions ; by the aid it gives to the civil powers, in securing fidelity, and in the discovery of truth ; and by the positive enforcement of good government on rulers, and of obedience on subjects,—it conduces to the temporal good of the society. This, I acknowledge, is comparatively but a secondary consideration ; for what is all worldly and temporary prosperity, compared with that exceeding great and eternal weight of glory which shall hereafter be revealed ? But though it be a consideration much inferior to the other, yet as holy writ occasionally directs our attention to it, we are certain, that it ought not to be overlooked. For had present advantages been totally unworthy the Christian's notice, the great apostle of the Gentiles had never thought it worth while to observe to us *, *that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come ; adding, This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.*

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. 9.

I shall conclude with subjoining these two inferences.

First, If the above representation of things be just, the secular powers ought to give all possible countenance to religion, the principal support of their authority, and to the ordinances of divine worship, the principal external means by which a sense of religion is propagated and preserved among mankind. If men in the more elevated ranks of life, those men especially who are vested with a share of either the legislative or the executive power, should display, in their conduct or conversation, a contempt of our Christian profession, they would not show themselves more plainly to be bad Christians in the common acceptation of the term, than to be (what possibly they would like worse to be accounted) injudicious magistrates, and ill-affected citizens, and consequently in all respects bad members of the commonwealth. We all know how prone inferiors are to imitate their superiors. And such is the depravity of human nature, that the vices of the great are much more readily copied than their virtues. Every man (whatever his condition in the world
may

may be) is obliged to be exemplary; but the obligation is much stronger on those whose example, by reason of their exalted stations, is capable of being much more beneficial, or much more hurtful, than that of ordinary men.

Secondly, If religion is of such indispensable necessity for the support of civil society, what shall we think of the patriotism or public virtue of those who assiduously endeavour, as far as their influence extends, to undermine its fundamental principles, and set men loose from all its obligations? Do not such appear to be as real enemies to their country, as to Christianity? Some perhaps would not scruple to add, enemies to human nature. Let people but coolly ask themselves, If our freethinkers, our speculative and philosophical latitudinarians, should succeed in the dark design they seem sometimes so zealously to prosecute; and if the disbelief of the principles, and the disregard to the rites, of religion, which already appear in too many, and plainly show their evil influence on the morals of the age, should, agreeably to the ordinary course of things, descend to the lowest ranks, and become universal,

universal, what will be the consequence? Who can hesitate to answer, The utter fall of religion? Let it not be pretended, that there is no danger from the reasonings of the sceptic, because these are far above the comprehension of vulgar understandings. For those men will fondly adopt the conclusion who are incapable of apprehending aught of the premises. The authority of great names among the learned will ever be to them a sufficient foundation. And if once our faith is subverted, is any so blind as to imagine, that religion will fall alone? Can her disgrace fail to be accompanied by that of virtue and good manners? In such general ruin,—what will be safe? Can we be vain enough to imagine,—that our laws and liberties, or any part of the constitution, will long survive? The subject is too full of horror to expatiate on. I leave it to the serious reflections of my hearers.

T H E E N D.

327166

